
This thesis argues that the American architect Whitney Warren (1864-1943) was a pioneer of private international preservation. Warren undertook a private campaign for monument protection during World War I in Europe, and the methodologies that he deployed for the first time have since formed the basis for modern practice in the field. Warren realized that, in the absence of a mechanism for monument protection to be triggered in the event of war, there was room for him to act. His first opportunity arose when Reims Cathedral was bombed during the second month of the conflict. Warren undertook an assessment of the building’s condition, which he disseminated broadly and took care to revisit periodically. Warren advocated for the protection of architectural monuments through newspaper articles and appeals published in the press, public lectures, and private letter-writing. He showed an enthusiastic interest in the Italian measures to protect monuments from damage by the Austro-Hungarian forces. During the conflict Warren enunciated a restoration philosophy, a result of his broad experience in Europe during that time. He would have preferred that damaged monuments be preserved in the ruined state, to serve as persistent physical indictments of the inappropriate conduct of war. This thesis discusses two projects of Warren’s that followed the war: a proposed reconstruction of the village of Coucy-le-Château, and a new building to replace the destroyed library of the University of Louvain, a design for which Warren is rightly famous. Warren pursued this highly prominent project vigorously, and turned it into a symbolic representation of the values that he had toiled for in 1914-1918.

Warren’s audacious campaign was precedent-setting for international preservation in several respects. First, Warren engaged the international press of the day, both through direct appeals and by encouraging coverage of events that he considered important. Second, he was able to reach out to influential individuals, who had access to financial and political resources, and deployed those in the service of his initiatives. Third, he personally undertook emergency assessment of conditions in the field, believing first-hand knowledge to be integral in successfully informing his approach. Fourth, he addressed the interested public on issues of monument protection in the conflict through lectures and publications. Fifth, he engaged in fundraising, and used the plight of monuments to that effect. Sometimes embryonic in their implementation by Warren, all these are characteristics of the operation of modern international preservation organizations. This thesis also traces some international developments that grew out of the milieu of World War I, and argues for the importance of this story to the historiography of preservation in the United States.

Please contact the author for research inquiries.